

07/27/21 Tuesday

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US Whistleblower Daniel Hale Gets Nearly Four Years in Prison for Leaking Classified Drone Intel
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Days ahead of his sentencing, the former US Air Force analyst issued an 11-page handwritten letter addressed to US District Judge Liam O'Grady that outlined how the effects of his military service prompted him to leak classified intelligence regarding the US' drone warfare program. At the time, he was facing nine years in prison.

American whistleblower Daniel Hale was sentenced to nearly four years behind bars on Tuesday for his decision to disclose top secret information about the US' lethal drone program to a journalist.

In the Tuesday ruling, US District Judge Liam O'Grady sentenced Hale to approximately 45 months in prison, noting the lengthy sentence was rooted in a so-called "need" to deter others working within the US government from wanting to take similar measures and leak classified intelligence.

O'Grady also underscored that Hale had other options at his disposal aside from simply handing over documents to a member of the media.

The sentencing, which was laid out at the US District Court in Alexandria, Virginia, will also include Hale's time served during trial; however, it will be followed with three years of supervised release.

US prosecutors had been arguing that Hale's leak caused "exceptionally grave damage" to the national security, and as such, merited at least a nine-year prison sentence, an amount of time that would have marked the longest punishment yet in a case involving the leak of government information.

Officials had claimed that Hale's disclosure had allegedly wound up in an online file that reportedly outlined how Daesh militants could avoid detection from US drones at the height of escalations.

While stationed in Afghanistan, Hale worked in tracking down drone targets, specifically by locating cell phone signals from individuals who were believed to be enemy combatants. However, in many cases, drone strikes caused the deaths of innocent civilians.

In an [11-page letter](#) to O'Grady ahead of the Tuesday sentencing, Hale acknowledged his move to leak intelligence was ill-advised, but that it was a necessary move as he could not in good conscience keep quiet on the devastation created by the lethal program.

"Notwithstanding, in 2012, a full year after the demise of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, I was a part of killing misguided young men who were but mere children on the day of 9/11," Hale wrote. "Nevertheless, in spite of my better instincts, I continued to follow orders and obey my command for fear of repercussions."

He later detailed that his feelings of guilt were what eventually forced him to reach out to the Intercept's Jeremy Scahill to detail how the drone warfare program racked up civilian casualties in places such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Yemen. Hale later went on to anonymously write a chapter for the book, "The Assassination Complex: Inside the Government's Secret Drone Warfare Program."

Hale eventually pleaded guilty in early April to one count of violating the 1917 Espionage Act as part of a plea deal that saw him initially facing up to 10 years behind bars. At the time, the whistleblower indicated that a trial was not an option for him as it would not be "fair."

Addressing the development, fellow whistleblower Edward Snowden stated via Twitter that the only crime Hale committed was "telling the truth," adding that the former analyst should be handed a "medal" instead of a prison sentence.

Supporters of Hale have since launched a [petition](#) to call on US President Joe Biden to pardon the Tennessee native for his offense. The effort by the Code Pink grassroots group has so far accrued nearly 6,500 signatures.

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Atlanta Spa Shooter Given Four Life Sentences After Pleading Guilty, Now Faces Death Penalty by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

The March shooting spree at Atlanta-area massage parlors committed by Georgia man Robert Aaron Long claimed the lives of eight individuals, the majority of whom were women of Asian descent. The shooting came amid heightened hostilities against the Asian community that emerged as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Robert Aaron Long, the 22-year-old at the center of the March spa shootings, pleaded guilty to killing four individuals on Tuesday and was subsequently ordered to serve four consecutive life sentences.

In addition to the life sentences, Judge Ellen McElyea stripped Long of the possibility of ever being released on parole and added on another 35 years to his punishment.

The Tuesday judgement was issued as part of a plea deal in which Long admitted guilt to all charges stemming from the four murders that took place in Georgia's Cherokee County at Young's Asian Massage. The offenses were listed as malice murder, felony murder, attempt to commit murder and aggravated assault.

At the time, the string of shootings particularly ignited outrage among many after investigators suggested the murders were not [racially motivated](#), and were instead the result of a sex addiction. The stance was reiterated by prosecutor Shannon Wallace, who told McElyea that investigators found no evidence of a gender or racial bias since Long had randomly begun shooting upon entering the establishment.

Speaking before the judge, Long told McElyea that he had sought to commit suicide on the day of the shooting, but thought he could overcome the urge by going to a spa. However, at some point after consuming alcohol inside his vehicle, he decided to attack the employees in order to "punish" them for working at the spa.

Long killed a total of four employees at the spa: Xiaojie "Emily" Tan, Daoyou Feng, Delaina Yaun and Paul Michels. One other individual was injured during the shooting rampage.

Death Penalty Looms

Over yonder in Georgia's Fulton County - in the heart of the Atlanta, Georgia, metro area - Long is facing the death penalty for the murder of four other women who were of South Korean descent.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis recently revealed that she intends to seek out both the death penalty and a hate crime enhancement sentence, which would see a jury determine whether or not Long's crimes were influenced by race.

"Last year, I told the voters of Fulton County that I could not imagine a circumstance where I would seek it," Willis said at a news conference in early May, touching on her initial apprehension toward the death penalty. "And at that time, I did not. Unfortunately, a case has arisen in the first few months of my term that I believe warrants it."

Incidentally, Wallace has stated that her office would have sought out a hate crimes enhancement on the basis of gender if the case had in fact gone to trial, as well as the death penalty.

In Fulton County, Long murdered Yong Ae Yue, Soon Chung Park, Suncha Kim and Hyun Jung Grant after walking into the Gold Spa and the Aromatherapy Spa, two Atlanta area businesses that were across the street from one another.

Long is scheduled to appear in Fulton County Court in August for the Atlanta charges. Should the second case go to trial, the New York Times [reported](#) that it may not be held until 2024 due to scheduling delays brought on by the pandemic.

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New Year, New Mission - Cartoon

Amid efforts to remove American forces from Afghanistan, talks of a potential US pullout from Iraq have remained constant, regardless of officials indicating troops would be staying put for some time. However, the Biden White House has since clarified that a shifting US mission will mean that no soldiers with a "combat role" will remain past 2021.

US President Joe Biden announced to the American public on Monday that the US will no longer be hosting combat troops in Iraq past 2021, marking the latest development in the administration's push to refresh its partnership with Iraqi leadership.

In a [joint statement](#) issued by the US Department of State, the Biden White House revealed that the US combat mission in Iraq would be ending by December 31, 2021, and that troops stationed in the war-torn country would be moving into advising and training roles.

Earlier in the day, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki had described the changes as being part of a "natural step" in the ever-evolving mission.

It's unclear if any troops will actually be removed from Iraq, or whether all troops will simply be transitioning into an advising position.

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US Sells Sole Copy of Wu-Tang Clan Album Forfeited by 'Pharma Bro' Martin Shkreli
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Martin Shkreli, also known as "Pharma Bro," is serving a seven-year sentence behind bars in connection to a 2017 conviction on two counts of securities fraud and one count of securities fraud conspiracy. Prior to Shkreli's sentencing, the court allowed the federal government to seize a number of assets, including a rare album by the Wu-Tang Clan.

Jacquelyn M. Kasulis, acting US attorney for the Eastern District of New York, announced on Tuesday that the federal government successfully sold off the sole physical copy of "Once Upon a Time in Shaolin," a 2015 album released by the Wu-Tang Clan.

"Through the diligent and persistent efforts of this Office and its law enforcement partners, Shkreli has been held accountable and paid the price for lying and stealing from investors to enrich himself. With today's sale of this one-of-a-kind album, his payment of the forfeiture is now complete," Kasulis said in a quoted statement.

The US government did not disclose the buyer, nor the final sale price.

However, \$7.4 million in total funds were acquired from the Forfeiture Money Judgment linked to Shkreli.

Shkreli, the former hedge-fund manager who purchased the album in 2016 for \$2 million, was publicly nicknamed "Pharma Bro" after he notoriously hiked the price of Daraprim, an anti-parasite drug commonly used, in combination with the antibiotic sulfadiazine, to treat pregnant women and individuals fighting HIV/AIDS-related complications.

While the Wu-Tang Clan has promised to conduct a "conventional album release" of their rare work in 2103, pieces of the 31-track album can be found on YouTube and across the net.

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Taiwanese Armed Forces to Travel to US for PAC-3 Test-Fire Drills
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Military expert Du Wenlong, director of the Chinese Military Culture Society, said earlier this month that, in the event of a conflict between Beijing and Taipei, Chinese forces would leave "no chance" for US intervention. "Before US forces arrive, we will have completed all our combat tasks," he said, noting forces would reach Taiwan within a day.

The Taiwanese Armed Forces, also known as the Republic of China Armed Forces, will soon hold a live-fire drill to test use of the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3), the US Army's premier air and missile defense system, according to a [recent report in Taiwan's Chinese-language newspaper Liberty Times](#).

The drill will occur at the US Army's [White Sands Missile Range](#), a military testing area in south-central New Mexico that has also been home to [drills conducted by the Japanese Ministry of Defense](#).

Officials will be sending around 40 individuals to take part in operations surrounding the test. During the drill, a target drone simulating a Chinese medium-range missile will be launched, giving members of the Taiwanese Armed Forces an opportunity to launch at least two Patriot missiles in response. Another projectile will be launched in the event that one of the missiles fails to intercept the target.

According to military officials who spoke with the outlet, Taiwan carries out these drills [every two years](#), and they must be performed in the US, due to security concerns. Presumably, the next drill will occur during, or after, 2022.

However, a timeline for this particular trip has yet to be set, as it was not included in this year's budget.

Taiwan has spent a total NT\$179 billion (US\$6.4 billion) on six PAC-3 systems and three rounds of upgrades to modernize its PAC-2 systems, per the military officials.

News of Taiwan's continued drills in the US comes alongside escalating tensions between the US, Taiwan and China regarding the self-governing island's authority, and Washington's increased diplomatic interactions with Taipei.

[Military expert Du Wenlong](#) remarked last week that recent drills conducted by the People's Liberation Army in the East China Sea were likely "targeted" at Taiwan.

"Taiwan is the target," he said, noting that Beijing was sending a "serious warning" to Taipei regarding their military engagements with Washington.

More recently, Chinese officials have enumerated a full list of [remedial demands and grievances](#) it has with the US. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has since expressed that Washington does "not seek confrontation" with Beijing and is "committed to pursuing a constructive, stable relationship with China, including stronger crisis communications with the People's Liberation Army."

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Chinese Navy Hold South China Sea Drills Amid Arrival of UK Carrier Strike Group

[Yu Lin](#)

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Both the US and China have accused the other of "destabilizing" the South China Sea with their military drills, but one nation has an extensive shoreline on the waterway and the other doesn't own a spot of territory within thousands of miles of it. Now the UK seems eager to assert its relevance and insert itself into the complex situation, too.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is holding military drills in the South China Sea this week in anticipation of the arrival of the British aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth and its task force.

From Monday until Thursday, the PLAN has closed off two areas of the South China Sea off China's southern Guangdong Province to maritime traffic, where it is holding maritime exercises, according to the [Global Times](#).

The report didn't name any Chinese warships taking part, but according to [satellite imagery](#) obtained from the European Space Agency last week, the PLAN aircraft carrier Shandong was in the South China Sea at that time, and the amphibious assault ship [Hainan was as well](#), earlier this month.

The Global Times noted that the drills likely weren't specifically timed to coincide with the arrival of the HMS Queen Elizabeth, which called to port in Singapore on Monday, but the paper noted that the drills demonstrate the readiness of PLAN forces, which have seen a pronounced uptick in activity by the US and its allies in the waters all around China, but specifically in the South China Sea, in recent months and years.

The British Royal Navy's new flagship, the 72,000-ton aircraft carrier embarked on its first tour of duty in May, stopping off at numerous ports along the way and [drilling with multiple](#) nations' navies, including the [US and India](#).

Last month, UK Foreign Secretary [Dominic Raab told](#) the foreign affairs committee in the House of Commons that "it's absolutely right we exercise and defend the rights, and we do so from the Ukrainian territorial sea to the South China Sea."

The UK defense ministry also revealed last week that two RN warships will be [permanently stationed](#) "in the region" later this year. However, Defense Minister Ben Wallace gave no indication which ships that would be or where they would be based, although the RN does operate a facility in Brunei in addition to its base in Singapore.

In response to the announcement and to the imminent arrival of the Queen Elizabeth, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [Zhao Lijian said](#) Beijing "firmly opposes the practice of flexing muscles," noting it "undermines China's sovereignty and security and sabotages regional peace and stability."

However, Zhao noted that if the British warships remain in international waters, their rights will be respected.

Fears about British "muscle flexing" [aren't unwarranted](#), though: just weeks ago, one of the ships in the RN's carrier task force, the HMS Defender, flagrantly violated Russian sovereignty by sailing through Russian territorial waters off the coast of Crimea. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson said the warship had never entered Russian waters - because the UK doesn't recognize Crimea's 2014 referendum to rejoin Russia and continues to insist that Crimea belongs to Ukraine, from which the peninsula declared independence prior to the referendum. The UK has [supported American efforts](#) to delegitimize Chinese territorial claims over several groups of small islands in the South China Sea that overlap with the claims of other regional nations, including Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam. While these nations have made strides toward resolving the disputes themselves, the US and its allies have [inserted themselves](#) into the situation, presenting it as one requiring military confrontation, rather than mutual cooperation, in order to be resolved.

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After China Delivers List of Remedial Demands, Pentagon Chief Says US Wants 'Stable Relationship'

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The Pentagon chief's comments in Singapore on Tuesday followed the typical pattern of American diplomatic statements on the issue of US-China relations: while saying he wanted peace and stability, he also levied a slew of unsubstantiated claims at China that placed sole blame for any rifts in that relationship on Beijing's lap.

"We will not flinch when our interests are threatened, yet we do not seek confrontation," US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Tuesday at the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank, adding that he is "committed to pursuing a constructive, stable relationship with China, including stronger crisis communications with the People's Liberation Army."

"Beijing's claim to the vast majority of the South China Sea has no basis in international law. That assertion treads on the sovereignty of states in the region," Austin said, according to the [South China Morning Post](#).

"Beijing's unwillingness to resolve disputes peacefully and respect the rule of law isn't just occurring on the water: we have also seen aggression against India, destabilizing military activity and other forms of coercion against the people of Taiwan, and genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang," he added.

The litany of accusations is familiar, having been repeated ad nauseum by US politicians and diplomats, from the 2+2 talks in Alaska in March to the more recent meetings of US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman with Chinese foreign vice-minister Xie Feng and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on Monday, and in US President Joe Biden's April address before a joint session of Congress on his 100th day in office.

However, Chinese responses have become sharper and more forceful in recent months, with Xie sending Sherman home on Monday with a [list of complaints](#) by Beijing and another of remedial actions Beijing expects the US to take to repair relations between the two countries. Many of them involve sanctions put in place by the US to punish various Chinese government and Communist Party of China officials for their involvement or proximity to the US' pet issues in China, including Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Taiwan, the South China Sea, tech giants like Huawei, and the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 novel coronavirus.

Wang similarly said that China and other nations must give the US "a good tutorial" in how to treat other nations as equals, because of how Washington behaves as if "it is superior to others."

By contrast, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [Zhao Lijian's comments](#) were more measured, saying that "the two sides had deep and thorough conversations, and enhanced mutual understanding."

"There is a big question mark on whether bilateral ties will head to conflict and confrontation or improvement and development," Zhao told reporters on Tuesday. "The US needs to think carefully and make the right choice."

Austin specifically addressed the situation in the South China Sea, which Singapore sits at the southernmost tip of. Washington has inserted itself into a regional dispute over maritime claims in the waterway, where not just China, but Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, and Vietnam are involved.

The nations have recently [redoubled their efforts](#) to arrive at a Code of Conduct governing interactions in the South China Sea, but the US has erroneously claimed that China is imposing its will on the other countries.

"We don't believe that any one country should be able to dictate the rules or worse yet, throw them over the transom, and in this regard I'll emphasise our commitment to freedom of the seas," Austin said, adding that he believed Beijing's claims were "unhelpful and unfounded." China has laid claim to an area of the waterway encompassing [several archipelagoes](#) of tiny islands called four-sha (four sands) based on historic sovereignty. In June 2020, the US Department of State formally rejected most of Beijing's claims, and has stepped up the so-called "freedom of navigation operations" (FONOPS) it uses to demonstrate contempt for them. In addition, US military drills and reconnaissance flights have also [greatly increased](#), and US allies like the United Kingdom have [sent their own](#) carrier battle group to drill in the sea. China has condemned the actions by the US and its allies in the South China Sea region as "destabilizing."

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Watch: US Reps. Gaetz, MTG Flee 1/6 Commission Presser After It's Swamped by Protesters by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Since the January 6, 2021, riot at the US Capitol, Republicans and Democrats have sparred over who is ultimately responsible, but the GOP itself is split over whether the rioters' actions aimed at keeping a Republican president in power were legal or justified.

Several Republican members of Congress were driven from the streets of Washington, DC, on Tuesday after a group of protesters disrupted their [press conference](#) on the "treatment of Jan. 6th prisoners" outside the US Department of Justice.

"You saw what happened here," US Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL) yelled on Tuesday afternoon, barely audible over the cacophony of whistles, chants, and cheers outside the DOJ building in downtown DC. "The Left shut us down. They hate free speech."

Gaetz, along with three other Republican congressmembers who supported Trump's claims, including Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), Louie Gohmert (R-TX) and Paul Gosar (R-AZ), gathered outside the offices of the DOJ to deliver a protest over the arrest of several participants in the insurrection who had stormed the US Capitol.

"To the guy that's blowing the whistle: we are not deterred. And so, for anyone that's here being an activist and yelling today, here's a statement that I need everyone to understand: we will not back down, we will not stop asking questions, we are looking for the truth," Greene said at the presser. "The taxpayers of this country pay all of these people's salaries, and they owe the people of this country the answers to the questions."

As the lawmakers and their entourage are steadily surrounded by the crowd of several dozen protesters, they decide they've lost control over the situation and begin to flee the podium for their vehicles.

As the protesters followed, they began to run in an attempt to escape. Nonetheless, persistent demonstrators managed to keep pace, asking Gaetz repeatedly “are you [a pedophile](#)?” After the lawmakers scrambled into their SUVs and drove away, the protesters sat on their laurels and listened to a go-go band jam amid signs that read “infrastructure not insurrection” and “traitors and rapists sit down.”

The press conference coincided with the opening day of hearings for the January 6 Commission, a Congressional inquiry into the assault on the US Capitol earlier this year by supporters of then-US President Donald Trump who sought to overturn the results of the November 2020 election. The close election was won by US President Joe Biden, but Trump claimed Biden’s victory was the result of fraud and he refused to recognize Biden as the winner, demanding that some ballots in contested states be thrown out and calling on his supporters to “stop the steal.”

Five people were killed in the riot, including a US Capitol Police officer and four protesters, one of whom was shot outside the Senate chamber by a USCP officer. The officers were among the first to [testify before the commission](#) on Tuesday, describing what it was like to face off against thousands of fellow Americans on the western steps of the national legislature who were attempting to force their way into the building.

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Olympic Committee Reminds Tokyo Athletes Not to Bite Medals as They’re Made of Recycled Electronics

by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

Humanity discarded about \$10 billion worth of gold, platinum, and other precious metals in 2019, according to a United Nations report. That amounts to 7.3 kilograms per person. That year, just 17% of wasted electronics were recycled, and the volume wasted is growing three times quicker than the human population.

So, did your favorite athlete at the Tokyo Olympics win the recycled VCR medal, the recycled cell phone medal, or did they take home the grand prize, the much-coveted recycled television medal?

It may sound like a cheekily imagined dystopia, but it’s actually the 2021 Tokyo Olympics Games, and the organizing committee has taken to social media to remind athletes about that fact when they get the impulse to engage in the time-honored tradition of biting their newly-won medals to verify their authenticity.

Tweeted from the official Tokyo 2020 Twitter account - the name of which was left unchanged despite a year’s postponement due to the COVID-19 pandemic - the Sunday post reminded athletes that the gold, silver, and bronze medals “are made from material recycled from electronic devices donated by the Japanese public.”

“So, you don’t have to bite them... but we know you still will,” they added.

It's actually been more than 100 years since the Olympics gave out true solid-gold medals, but in those heady days, the bite test was used to see if the medal was soft enough for a tooth to leave an impact mark - fake gold would be harder and resist the bite.

However, making them out of recycled metal is a much newer novelty. Tokyo set about preparing for the games years ago, not only by building new facilities, but by launching a vast donation drive to collect obsolete or broken electronic devices from the city's 14 million people. Between April 1, 2017, and March 30, 2019, the [Tokyo 2020 Medal Project](#) collected 78,985 tons of electronic devices, including 6.21 million used mobile phones. From them they extracted 32 kilograms of gold, 3,500 kilograms of silver, and 2,200 kilograms of bronze.

All three metals are very useful for making circuit boards, where they are favored over copper because they resist corrosion. Due to the incredible volume of waste humans discard each year, [some experts think](#) we will soon have to mine landfills for their sizable concentrations of aluminum, copper, zinc, and steel, in addition to precious metals like gold, silver, and bronze.

"We are grateful for everyone's cooperation on this project. We hope that our project of recycling small consumer electronics and our efforts to contribute to an environmentally-friendly and sustainable society will form part of the legacy of the Tokyo 2020 Games," the committee said on its page about the medal project.

That said, the medals are far from worthless. The gold medal is mostly made of silver but still contains about 6 grams of gold, together amounting to about \$830 each, according to Parade. However, the silver medals are 100% silver and worth about \$445 each. However, the bronze medals are made of red brass, a related alloy of copper and zinc, and worth no more than \$2.50.

In all, the Olympic Committee made about 5,000 medals total, to be used for both the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, which are immediately after the Olympics and feature athletes with a range of disabilities.

However, maybe this time it's best if athletes just stick to kissing their prizes.

Just don't follow the lead of Moroccan boxer Youness Baalla, who was [recently disqualified](#) for attempting to bite his opponent, New Zealand's David Nyika, on his ear during a match.

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Texas National Guard to Begin Arresting Illegal Migrants on Southern Border - Governor

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Texas National Guard troops have been granted the authority to help state police officers arrest migrants illegally crossing into the United States along the southern border with Mexico, Texas Governor Greg Abbott said in a letter.

"By virtue of the power and authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the State of Texas, I hereby order that the Texas National Guard assist DPS [state police] in enforcing Texas law by arresting lawbreakers at the border," Abbott said in a letter to the head of the Texas National Guard, Major General Tracy Norris on Tuesday.

Abbott is also in the process of using his authority to build additional border wall along the Texas-Mexico border, but construction has not begun.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data shows that Border Patrol agents encountered 188,829 undocumented migrants on the US southern border in the month of June, bringing the total number of apprehensions in the region since October to 1.1 million.

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Hundreds to Join Texas March for Action on Voting Rights, Poverty - Organizer

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Hundreds are expected to join a 27-mile march to the Texas state capital of Austin, where protesters will hold a rally and call on Congress to act on voter suppression, poverty and inequality, an organizer told Sputnik.

The marchers have five demands, including an end to the filibuster in the US Senate, passage of full For the People Act, and complete restoration of the Voting Rights Act, The Poor People's campaign said in a statement. The group is also urging passage of a minimum living wage of \$15 per hour.

The 27-mile trek began in Georgetown, Texas on Tuesday and ends in Austin on July 30.

"We were called into Texas by grassroots activists, local leaders and clergy. We have leaders, clergy and activists in 42 states. Texas is ready," Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis told Sputnik. "It is the site of a very significant fusion of people and organizations. There are significant issues around voter suppression. We're here joining them to lift up this struggle which is a long and urgent one."

The reverend said although they are expecting "hundreds and hundreds" of people they will take measures to protect against the pandemic.

"At any one time for COVID security and safety, we will have not much more than 100 people marching at any one time," she added.

Theoharis, co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign, said the purpose of the march is also to bring national attention to the plight of 140 million Americans who live in poverty or who are low wage-earners. On Saturday morning, she said, there will be a 150-car procession with a hearse symbolizing those living in poverty who have suffered and died.

"The states and politicians that have produced voter suppression are the same places where there is increased poverty, low wages and lack of protections for immigrants. We see the connection between attacks on democracy and the elevation of poverty," she said. "140 million Americans are living in poverty or are low wage earners, 13 million in Texas."

For too long, she said, we have not heard about issues of poor and low-income people.

"What does success look like? A shift in the narrative in the nation, states, politics and the media, talking about the reality, the reality of the poor and low wealth people," Theoharis said.

"This is not a democracy if half of the people are low income or poor. This is about building power."

She said one of the movement's primary goals is to continue unleashing the power of poor and low-income people.

"If/when they turn out at the same levels of higher income people, we could see a significant shift," Theoharis said. "But their presence to the polls is affected by their jobs, illness,

transportation issues and other challenges. We saw in 2020 in state and national elections, a very high number of poor voters who cast ballots and voted for candidates/politicians dealing with racism, extending healthcare and addressing issues of the poor - the pandemics of poverty and racism. Those voters made the difference."

What's clear, the theologian said, is that there is a fear in certain circles of the powerful fusion of the poor, those languishing in low-income jobs, Blacks, whites, Native, Latino and others. And those in power seek to blunt this coalition by employing the tactic of decades and centuries-long disinvestment and since the 2020 presidential election, disenfranchisement at the polls.

"Since gutting the Voting Rights Act in 2013, there have been fewer voting rights today than at the time of passage," Theoharis said. "In addition to that we're seeing introduction and passage of voter ID laws, the closing of polling stations, increased monitoring of immigrants and police at polling sites."

Texas is one of 48 states that have introduced or proposed 408 voter suppression bills in Republican-dominated legislatures around the United States as of May 19th. So far, 25 have been signed into law.

But the Texas legislature has so far been stymied in their efforts to make a sweeping Republican voting reform bill, called SB 7, into law. That's because 58 Democrats in the House of Representatives left the state in early July and flew to Washington, DC to deny Republicans a quorum and block them from passing a new onerous and restrictive voting rights law in the remaining 27 days of the special legislative session called by Gov. Greg Abbott.

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World Bank Chief Stresses to Iraq Prime Minister Importance of Banking Reforms - Statement

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - World Bank President David Malpass during a meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi emphasized the need for the Middle Eastern country to reform its banking sector and boost private investment, the international financial body said in a statement.

"President Malpass emphasized to Prime Minister Al-Kadhimi the importance of infrastructure, banking sector reforms, and accelerating private sector investment in Iraq," the release said on Tuesday.

Malpass also affirmed the World Bank's commitment to supporting Iraq's public sector administration reform and strengthening the private sector as the country opens to business. Al-Kadhimi met President Joe Biden on Monday at the White House, where they announced the US would end its combat role in Iraq by the end of the year.

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Pandemic Threatens Progress Eliminating Hepatitis in Latin America - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The coronavirus pandemic had disrupted diagnosis and treatment of viral hepatitis B and C, slowing progress toward the goal of eliminating the infectious diseases by 2030, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) said.

"More than half of the 18 Latin American and Caribbean countries surveyed reported some level of disruption in the diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis B and C," the PAHO said in a press release on Tuesday.

In the Americas, an estimated 5.4 million people live with hepatitis B infections, while 4.8 million are infected with hepatitis C, the release said.

Although vaccination can eliminate early childhood transmission of hepatitis B, vaccinations have slowed during the pandemic, the release added.

The pandemic has also prevented nations from scaling up treatment of hepatitis C with anti-viral drugs, which have demonstrated a 95 percent cure rate, according to the release.

The PAHO has set a goal of eliminating hepatitis in the Americas by the end of the decade.

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White House Plans to Issue Vaccine Requirement for Federal Employees Thursday - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The White House plans to issue a requirement for all federal employees and contractors to be vaccinated against the novel coronavirus, CNN reported citing a source with direct knowledge of the matter.

The report said on Tuesday that federal employees or contractors who choose not to get vaccinated will be subject to regular testing and mitigation requirements.

Earlier on Tuesday, President Joe Biden told reporters that he was considering placing a vaccination mandate on federal employees.

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CDC Recommends Indoor Masking in New Major COVID-19 Areas, Schools in US - Director

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Tuesday that it was reintroducing its recommendation for masking, including for vaccinated people, in new COVID-19-prone areas as well as schools as infections from the virus hit fresh peaks.

"In areas with substantial and high transmission, CDC recommends fully vaccinated people wear masks in public indoor settings to help prevent the spread of the Delta variant," CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said on Tuesday. "CDC recommends that everyone in K to 12 schools wear a mask indoors, including teachers, staff, students and visitors."

The CDC defines "substantial transmission" as counties that have 50 to 100 cases per 100,000 residents over a seven-day period and "high transmission" is more than 100 cases per 100,000 people over seven days.

"We have places and counties and states here that are now reporting over 300 cases per 100,000 over a seven day period. So really an extraordinary amount of viral transmission, which is what we're concerned about," Walensky said.

Health officials say fully-vaccinated individuals, who represent about 50 percent of Americans, are a small percentage of the the coronavirus transmissions. But they could also be carriers of the new Delta variant of the virus which is more transmissible.

Walensky said the pandemic continues to pose a serious threat to the health of all Americans.

"Today, we have new science related to the delta variant that requires us to update the guidance regarding what you can do when you are fully vaccinated," she said.

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Ford to Open \$100M In Electric Vehicle Battery Research Park in US State of Michigan

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - A \$189-million investment in new battery technology and speedier manufacturing methods will include a \$100 million industrial park to accelerate vehicle electrification efforts, Ford said.

"A new collaborative learning lab opening next year, Ford Ion Park represents \$100 million of Ford's \$185 million investment in developing, testing, and building vehicle battery cells and cell arrays," Ford said in a press release on Tuesday.

The Ion Park facility will provide a home base for research on new battery technology and piloting advanced manufacturing techniques to quickly scale production of new battery designs, the release said.

The facility based in the city of Romulus is part of Ford's overall \$30 billion investment in electrification by 2025, the release added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

* US President Joe Biden on Tuesday warned that it is more likely the United States would end up in a shooting war with Russia as a consequence of a cyber breach, and claimed Russia is already meddling in the US midterm elections.

* Very significant problems have accumulated in the relations between the United States and Russia and failing to solve them would make it impossible to prevent moving to an even greater crisis, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said.

* Russia calls for reviving the work of the Bering Strait Regional Commission to include representatives of the indigenous population, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said.

* Russia and the United States could collaborate on combating natural and man-made disasters, Antonov said.

IMF REPORT ON GLOBAL ECONOMY

* The global economy is expected to grow at 6 percent in 2021 and at 4.9 percent in 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its updated World Economic Outlook report on Tuesday.

* The IMF has changed upward its economic outlook for Russia in 2021 to 4.4 percent, the IMF said.

* Global trade will expand 9.7 percent in 2021 and 7 percent next year, the IMF revealed.

* The IMF revised its forecast for US economic growth to 7 percent in 2021 and to 4.9 percent in 2022, the fund said.

* The IMF has revised downward its forecast for economic growth in China to 8.1 percent this year, but increased it to 5.7 percent for 2022, the IMF said.

OLYMPIC GAMES IN TOKYO

* The Russian women's artistic gymnastics team won the Olympic tournament for the first time in history at the Tokyo games on Tuesday.

* Russian athlete Vladislav Larin won the Taekwondo Olympic gold medal in the +80kg weight category among men after defeating North Macedonia's Dejan Georgievski in the final.

* French judoka Clarisse Agbegnenou won the Olympic gold medal after defeating Slovenia's Tina Trstenjak in the final of the -63 kg weight category among women,

CORONAVIRUS

* The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Tuesday it now recommends even the fully vaccinated people to resume wearing masks in areas showing new high transmission rates for coronavirus infections.

* White House staff will be ready to wear face masks again if so required amid the spread of the coronavirus' Delta variant, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

* President Joe Biden said his administration is currently considering requiring all US federal employees to get vaccinated for the coronavirus.

INTER-KOREAN COMMUNICATIONS

* UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is encouraged to see North and South Korea resuming the communication channels between them, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

* The United States welcomes the restoration of communication lines between South and North Korea and believes diplomacy is essential in achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula, US Department of State Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter said.

EMERGENCY LANDING IN SIMFEROPOL

* A Boeing aircraft with 165 people on board is preparing for an emergency landing at Simferopol airport due to technical problems with its engine, an emergency services spokesperson told Sputnik.

* A Boeing aircraft with 165 people on board that had engine issues safely landed in Simferopol, the Russian emergency services told Sputnik.

EXPLOSION IN GERMANY

* One person was killed and 16 others injured in the explosion at a chemical plant in the German city of Leverkusen, while four people are still missing, enterprise operator Chempark said on Tuesday.

* The threat remains in the German city of Leverkusen after an explosion at a chemical plant, and the composition of emissions is being specified, enterprise operator Chempark said.

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Biden Warns of War With Russia Over Cyberattacks, Says Russia Meddling in 2022 Election

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Tuesday during remarks to the US national intelligence community warned of a possible threat of war with Russia stemming from cyberattacks, and claimed that Russia was already meddling in next year's midterm elections in the United States.

"I think it's more likely we are going to end up in a war, a real shooting war with a major power. It's going to be a consequence of a cyber breach, of great consequence," Biden said as he visited the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Biden said earlier the same morning he had received an intelligence brief on Russia alleging that Moscow is meddling in the upcoming US election.

"Look what Russia is doing already about the 2022 elections and misinformation. It's a pure violation of our sovereignty," Biden said.

Commenting on his recent summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Biden said, "He knows that you're better than his team, and it bothers the hell out of him."

In March, the US intelligence community accused Russia of interference in the 2020 US election. The Russian Embassy in Washington said in a statement that the accusations are groundless and that no facts or concrete evidence have been provided to support those claims. A US intelligence report on foreign threats to the 2020 elections claims that Putin authorized efforts to undermine the then Democratic candidate Joe Biden.

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US Stocks Slump, Snapping 5-Day Rally Ahead of Federal Reserve Meeting, Big Tech Earnings

NEW YORK, July 27 (Sputnik) - US stocks slumped on Tuesday, snapping a five-day rally and record-high run, as caution seeped in ahead of the Federal Reserve's monthly decision on interest rates and as players took profit before a slew of second quarter earnings results from Big Tech companies.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite fell 180 points, or 1.2 percent, to close at 14,661, to lead Wall Street's losses for the day just before high-flying names as Microsoft, Google and Apple were to report quarterly earnings. In Monday's session, Nasdaq posted a record high of 14,864. The S&P 500 index, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, closed down 20 points, or 0.5 percent, at 4,402. The S&P500 hit its highest peak ever of 4,415 in the previous session.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average, the broadest US equity barometer on the New York Stock Exchange, lost 86 points, or 0.2 percent, to finish at 35,059. The Dow hit an all-time high of 35,150 on Monday.

"We're continuing to see caution in the markets on Tuesday as investors prepare for an intense 48 hours, with big tech reporting and the Fed meeting," Craig Erlam, analyst at the New York-based brokerage firm OANDA, said.

The Federal Reserve will announce on Wednesday its decision on whether it will raise interest rates and on other important monetary matters for July.

Most analysts have said they do not expect the Federal Reserve to initiate any changes, although they expect the central bank to provide more details about when it hopes to begin tapering the monthly purchase of \$120 billion of bonds it has been doing since the coronavirus pandemic broke out 16 months ago.

Investors will also get a first look on Thursday at second-quarter US GDP, which is expected to show the peak of post-pandemic recovery.

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Biden Intends to Nominate Career Diplomat Mark Gitenstein as US Envoy to EU - White House

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden intends to nominate career diplomat Mark Gitenstein to the position United States ambassador to the European Union, the White House said on Tuesday.

"Today, President Joe Biden announced his intent to nominate the following nine individuals to serve in key roles... Mark Gitenstein, nominee for Representative of the United States of America to the European Union, with rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary," the White House said in a notice.

Gitenstein served as US ambassador to Romania and had been engaged in different projects in Central and Eastern Europe, the notice said.

In addition, Biden seeks to nominate William Valdez for the position Under Secretary of Homeland Security, Laura Holgate as US Representative to the United Nations office in Vienna and the International Atomic Energy Agency, as well as other nominees as ambassadors to the Central African Republic, Spain and Mozambique.

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US Court Orders Forfeiture of Ancient Tablet Portraying Epic of Gilgamesh - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - A US court ordered the permanent forfeiture of a cuneiform tablet following sales to multiple buyers beginning in 2003 that ended with the artifact's seizure from a US museum in 2019, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"Known as the Gilgamesh Dream Tablet, it originated in the area of modern-day Iraq and entered the United States contrary to federal law. An international auction house later sold the tablet to Hobby Lobby Stores Inc., a prominent arts-and-crafts retailer based in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, for display at the Museum of the Bible," the department said in a press release.

The tablet was originally purchased by a US antiquities dealer in 2003 from the family member of a London coin dealer. Multiple sales followed ending with the 2014 purchase by Hobby Lobby for the retailer's Washington, DC Bible-themed museum, the release said.

Hobby Lobby agreed to forfeit the tablet, and law enforcement agents took possession in 2019, the release added.

The tablet measuring 6 inches by 5 inches is written in the Akkadian language. It includes a portion of the epic of Gilgamesh, a Sumerian poem considered one of the world's oldest works of literature, according to the release.

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Biden Warns of War With Russia Over Cyberattacks, Says Russia Meddling in 2022 Election

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden on Tuesday during remarks to the US national intelligence community warned of a possible threat of war with Russia stemming from cyberattacks, and claimed that Russia was already meddling in next year's midterm elections in the United States.

"I think it's more likely we are going to end up in a war, a real shooting war with a major power. It's going to be a consequence of a cyber breach, of great consequence," Biden said as he visited the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

Biden said earlier the same morning he had received an intelligence brief on Russia alleging that Moscow is meddling in the upcoming US election.

"Look what Russia is doing already about the 2022 elections and misinformation. It's a pure violation of our sovereignty," Biden said.

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US Announces Nearly \$199Mln in Additional Assistance for Somalia - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The United States will provide nearly \$199 in additional humanitarian aid for Somalia, which has been challenged by chronic food insecurity, violence, climatic shocks and the coronavirus pandemic, US Department of State spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The United States is providing nearly \$199 million in additional humanitarian assistance for the people of Somalia who have faced decades of chronic food insecurity, violence, and cycles of drought and flooding -the impacts of which have all been compounded by desert locusts and the COVID-19 pandemic," Price said.

The new funding will support nearly six million Somalis in need of aid, including three million internally displaced and nearly 500,000 Somali refugees in Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya, Price said.

The assistance will include emergency food and nutrition items, clean drinking water sanitation, shelter, education, protection and health care, Price added.

The United States has provided more than \$408 million to support Somalia during fiscal year 2021.

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Biden Says Plan to Require Vaccinations for US Federal Employees Under Consideration

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden said on Tuesday his administration is currently considering requiring all US federal employees to get vaccinated for the coronavirus.

"That's under consideration right now, and if you're not vaccinated you're not nearly as smart as I thought you were," Biden said, when asked whether his administration was considering such a plan.

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Lawsuit Claims J&J Targeted Black Women in Marketing of Baby Powder Linked to Cancer

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - A lawsuit filed against Johnson & Johnson on Tuesday accuses the pharmaceutical company of specifically marketing its baby powder to Black women regardless of its links to ovarian cancer.

"Ben Crump of ben Crump Law and Paul Napoli of Napoli Shkolnik today announced the filing of a lawsuit against Johnson and Johnson on behalf of members of the National Council of Negro Women, citing the company's specific marketing of talcum-based baby powder to Black women, despite links to ovarian cancers," the attorneys in the case said in a press release.

The release said internal documents from Johnson & Johnson support the accusations in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit is asking Johnson and Johnson to take corrective action to inform Black women and all other consumers about the link their products have to ovarian cancers, the release said.

Johnson & Johnson has found itself in legal trouble in recent years after reports questioned the safety of its baby powder. The company is currently facing up to 25,000 lawsuits from consumers of the brand's baby powder who insist that asbestos, allegedly in the product, caused cancer.

Johnson & Johnson disputes that the talc causes cancer but it stopped using talc in baby powder in the United States and Canada since May last year, citing lack of demand fueled by misinformation about the product's safety and a constant barrage of litigation advertising.

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US CDC Recommends Vaccinated People Wear Masks in High-Risk COVID Areas - Walensky

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said on Tuesday it was recommending that even vaccinated people resume wearing masks in areas showing new high transmission rates for COVID as infections from the virus surge again.

"In areas with substantial and high transmission, CDC recommends fully vaccinated people wear masks in public indoor settings to help prevent the spread of the Delta variant," CDC Director Rochelle Walensky told a media briefing. "CDC recommends that everyone in K to 12 schools wear a mask indoors, including teachers staff, students and visitors."

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US Has 'Lost Confidence' in Guatemala's Commitment to Fight Corruption - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The United States does not have confidence anymore in the Guatemalan government to fight corruption after the country's attorney general fired the chief anti-corruption special prosecutor on Friday, US State Department deputy spokesperson Jalina Porter said.

"Guatemala Attorney General Consuelo Porras' July 23 decision to remove Special Prosecutor Against Impunity, or FECI, Chief Juan Francisco Sandoval fits a pattern of behavior that indicates a lack of commitment to the rule of law, and independent judicial and prosecutorial processes. As a result, we have lost confidence in the Attorney General and their decision and intention to cooperate with the US government and fight corruption in good faith," Porter said on Tuesday.

The United States has made it clear to the Guatemalan government that fighting corruption is essential to the shared goals of strengthening the rule of law, increasing economic opportunity and addressing the root causes of irregular migration, she said.

Although the decision to remove Sandoval is within the official authority of Porras, the United States is concerned with the implications of that decision, Porter also said..

Washington will be watching closely to see if the Guatemalan government takes any further actions to undermine the rule of law or judicial independence in the country, Porter added.

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US Concerned By Attacks Against Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia's Tigray - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The United States is deeply concerned about reports of attacks against Eritrean refugees trapped in the conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region and calls on all actors in the region to cease violence and intimidation, US State Department deputy spokesperson Jalina Porter said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"We are deeply concerned about credible reports of attacks by military forces affiliated with the Tigray People's Liberation Front and the Tigrayan militants against Eritrean refugees in the Tigray Region, particularly, reports of violence in refugee camps," Porter said.

Porter also said the United States calls on "all armed actors in Tigray to stop attacks and intimidation against Eritrean forces and all refugees, asylum seekers, and people displaced by the ongoing violence, as well as against the aid workers attempting to respond to the humanitarian disaster."

Porter also called on all parties in Tigray to strictly adhere to obligations under international humanitarian law and urged those responsible for abuses to be held accountable.

Earlier on Tuesday, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said that about 24,000 Eritrean refugees in camps in Tigray's Mai Tsebri face intimidation and harassment and are cut off from essential humanitarian assistance, including clean drinking water and food.

The United Nations also said it received credible reports of at least one refugee in the Mai Aini camp being killed by armed actors operating in the area.

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Swastika Found Carved Into Elevator at US State Department Building - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - A swastika that was found carved into an elevator at the US State Department's headquarters in Washington on Monday has since been removed and the incident subject to investigation, Spokesperson Jalina Porter said on Tuesday.

"Unfortunately, yesterday a swastika was found carved in an elevator in our building here at the State Department. This hateful graffiti has been removed, and the incident will be investigated," Porter told reporters.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken sent out a message to all employees that the incident is "completely abhorrent" and acts as a reminder that antisemitism is not a relic of the past.

Porter could not confirm reports that the swastika carving was found particularly close to the Office of the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, simply stating that anywhere at the State Department building or on US soil is "unwelcome" and will be condemned.

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US Drone Whistleblower Sentenced to 45 Months Over Leaks to Journalist

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge sentenced former US intelligence analyst and whistleblower Daniel Hale to nearly four years in prison for leaking top secret information to a journalist, the Justice Department said on Monday.

Hale was arrested in 2019 for leaking classified information that revealed US drone strikes had killed innocent people during operations in the Middle East.

"A Tennessee man was sentenced today to 45 months in prison followed by three years of supervised release for illegally obtaining classified national defense information and disclosing it to a reporter," the Justice Department said in a press release.

US District Judge Liam O'Grady reportedly told Hale he was prosecuted for violating the Espionage Act, not for speaking out about the drone program.

"You are not being prosecuted for speaking out about the drone program killing innocent people," the judge said as quoted by The Washington Post. "You could have been a whistleblower ... without taking any of these documents."

Hale during the hearing said it was especially wrong "to kill the defenseless." He also said the leak "was necessary to dispel the lie that drone warfare keeps us safe, that our lives are worth more than theirs."

Edward Snowden in a tweet on Tuesday called Hale "one of the great American whistleblowers," whose crime was telling the truth.

The release did not identify the journalist or the news outlet, but the correspondent is reportedly Jeremy Scahill, a founding editor of the Intercept.

Hale, 31, of Nashville, Tennessee, served as an enlisted airman in the US Air Force from July 2009 to July 2013. After receiving language and intelligence training, Hale later worked as an intelligence analyst for a defense contractor at the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (NGA).

Hale started communicating with the journalist in April 2013 while enlisted in the Air Force and assigned to the National Security Agency, the release said. In February 2014, while working at the NGA, Hale printed six classified documents unrelated to his work, which were later published by the journalist's news outlet, the release added.

The news outlet published 11 classified documents that had been provided by Hale, the release said.

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US Welcomes Restoration of North Korea-South Korea Communications - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The United States welcomes the restoration of communication lines between South and North Korea and believes diplomacy is essential in achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula, US Department of State Deputy Spokesperson Jalina Porter said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"The US supports inter-Korean dialogue, engagement, and, of course, welcomes today's announcement of restoration of inter-Korean communication lines and certainly believes that this is an important step," Porter said. "Diplomacy and dialogue are essential to achieving complete denuclearization and ... peace on the Korean Peninsula."

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Biden Asks US Congress for \$1Bln to Relocate Afghans Who Helped American Forces - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden has asked Congress for \$1 billion to be allocated towards efforts to relocate Afghan nationals who assisted American forces during the war, Bloomberg reported on Tuesday.

The \$1 billion would be split between the State and Defense Departments, with \$25 million also being given to the Health and Human Services Department's Office of Refugee Resettlement, the report said.

The funds would be used to pay for shelter, resettlement and other necessities, according to persons familiar with the matter.

The Biden administration reportedly asked for the funds on Friday. However, the request did not include a detailed plan.

The funding would be attached to another measure intended to bolster security in the Capitol complex and reimburse the Capitol Police and the National Guard for any expenses incurred as a result of the January 6 incident.

Relocation flights for the first group of Afghans applying for Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) status are set to begin in this final week of July, the White House said earlier in the month. One known

resettlement location is Fort Lee in Virginia, where the SIV applicants and their families will temporarily stay until the vetting process completes.

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Biden to Visit New York 9/11 Memorial to Mark 20th Anniversary of Attacks - Politico

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - President Joe Biden is expected to attend the 9/11 memorial in New York City to mark the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks there, the Politico news site reported on Tuesday, citing four sources with knowledge of the matter.

The White House recently indicated to officials in New York that Biden plans to travel for the commemoration at the World Trade Center in the city, two of the sources said, Politico reported. Officials were also considering possible stops at other locations hit in the 9/11 attacks - the Pentagon in Virginia and the Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville, Pennsylvania - although one said it may be logistically difficult for Biden to be in all three spots in a day. US presidents have made it a custom to attend the annual memorial services at either the World Trade Center or the Virginia and Pennsylvania sites combined to honor the nearly 3,000 people killed in the attacks on September 11, 2001.

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US House Prices Up 18% on Year in May as Demand Outstrips Supply - Federal Housing Agency

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - House prices in the United States increased by 18 percent in May from a year ago, the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) said on Tuesday, indicating demand was still exceeding supply.

On a monthly basis, home prices increased 1.7 percent from April, continuing an unbroken trend for at least the last 18 months, the FHFA price index showed.

"House prices continued their record-setting growth into May," FHFA Deputy Director Lynn Fisher said in a statement. "This trend will likely continue around the country as busy summer home-buying months maintain the pressure being felt in already tight housing markets."

US house prices have risen every year without a blip for nearly ten years now, appreciating even during last year's coronavirus pandemic.

Prices have particularly increased in 2021 due to the strong re-emergence of the economy from the coronavirus pandemic and higher buying capability for Americans empowered by pandemic relief payouts by the government.

The median price for new single-family homes stood at \$361,800 in June, versus the average of \$428,700. In April, the median was just \$341,600.

The housing market is one of the cornerstones of the US economy, accounting for nearly 15 percent of Gross Domestic Product.

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Over Half of Unvaccinated Adults in US Say They Will Not Get Jabs - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - A 54 percent majority of likely US voters who remain unvaccinated against the novel coronavirus say they do not expect to change their minds, a Rasmussen Reports poll said on Tuesday.

"Among voters who have not yet been vaccinated, 53 percent say they don't plan to get a COVID-19 vaccination in the future, while 20 percent say they do expect to get the vaccine and 27 percent are not sure," a press release explaining the poll said.

The survey of 930 US likely voters was conducted on July 25-26, with a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points and a 95 percent confidence level.

In recent weeks, just over 500,000 Americans are being vaccinated each day compared with a peak of more than 3 million daily jabs in April, officials say.

About 69 percent of US adults or 178 million have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and 60 percent or 155 million are fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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White House Staff Prepared to Wear Masks Again if Required - Spokesperson

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - White House staff will be ready to wear face masks again if so required amid the spread of the coronavirus' Delta variant, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"We will be prepared to wear masks again if required if the guidance is leading to that," Psaki said during a press conference.

Psaki said the US government will abide by guidance on masking issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"Our hope is that elected officials, leaders, civic leaders, public health experts around the country also look at the CDC guidance and will be constructive partners and voices and sharing with their communities what steps they could take," she said.

The role of the federal government is to continue to look at evolving data of the virus and to save more lives, Psaki added.

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US Repatriates 27 Cubans From 2 Interdictions Off Florida Coast - Coast Guard

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Two vessels of migrants seized near Florida's coast resulted in the repatriation of 27 refugees to Cuba on the cutter Charles Sexton, the US Coast Guard said on Tuesday.

"In the first interdiction, a good Samaritan reported a 21-foot vessel with 22 people aboard, approximately 7 miles south of Key West," the Coast Guard said in a press release. "They were brought aboard Coast Guard Cutter William Trump and transferred to the Charles Sexton and reported in good health."

An additional five migrants on a makeshift raft were seized 15 miles off the Florida coast and transferred to the Charles Sexton for repatriation, the release said.

The release gave no indication that the two attempts to flee Cuba were connected with recent protests on the island against deteriorating economic conditions and a resulting crackdown on dissent.

However, the Coast Guard said it had interdicted 595 Cubans so far in the 2021 fiscal year, which began October 1, compared with just 49 Cubans in fiscal 2020.

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US House Republicans Demand 'Fair Treatment' for Capitol Riot Detainees

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Republican members of the House of Representatives held a press conference outside of the Justice Department building on Tuesday to discuss the jail conditions and prosecution of individuals being detained in connection with the January 6 riot at the US Capitol.

Representatives Marjorie Taylor-Greene, Matt Gaetz, Louis Gohmert and others spoke about their concerns regarding reports of January 6 detainees being abused and placed in solitary confinement in addition to being denied due process.

"We ought to make sure that [detainees] are treated fairly when they get to jail. We have been asking for months for meetings with the Attorney General. We have asked for letters to the DC jail and been refused ... We still need to know: Do we have political prisoners here in America or not? And we can't get an answer," Representative Louis Gohmert said.

The speakers were forced to talk over the sound of a loud sports whistle being blown by a protester in the audience. Taylor-Greene said at the conclusion of the press conference that they were "not deterred" by such actions.

Following the press conference, a group of protesters also forced the lawmakers to hastily leave the scene as security attempted to keep the peace.

The event took place amid the first days of hearings for the select committee formed to investigate the January 6 incident, which included testimony from Capitol Police officers. One officer described the scene as a "medieval battlefield" while another said that even his experience in the Iraqi war zone did not prepare him for what he saw that day.

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US to Boost Supply of Coronavirus Vaccine Doses to Africa - Trade Representative

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The United States is partnering with Africa to boost the supply of coronavirus vaccines to the continent as the Delta variant continues to spread, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said in a pre-recorded speech released to the US-Africa Business Summit on Tuesday.

"We are partnering with the African Union and the African CDC to distribute doses to those most at risk, and we will continue to ramp up the safe and secure transfer of vaccines through the rest of the year," Tai said. "We've all seen the alarming statistics, in particular how many of the new cases come from the Delta variant."

Tai said defeating the coronavirus and helping facilitate a robust global economic recovery were interconnected and top priorities for Africa and the United States.

"At the moment, less than 2 percent of Africa's population is vaccinated, and the World Health Organization recently said that Africa experienced the worst surge of cases in late June since the pandemic began," she noted.

Tai also said since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the US government has announced more than \$500 million in emergency health, humanitarian, economic and development assistance to sub-Saharan Africa.

In addition, the US government provided an initial \$2 billion - out of a total planned \$4 billion - to support vaccines for 92 low- and middle-income countries that are eligible to participate in the COVAX Advanced Market Commitment Facility.

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Record 35% of Black Americans Report Unfair Treatment While Shopping in Past Month - Poll

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - A new high of 35 percent of African Americans say they have experienced unfair treatment while shopping during the past 30 days, a Gallup poll revealed on Tuesday.

"Black Americans' self-reports of being treated unfairly in a variety of situations are generally steady or higher rather than declining. This includes a new high of 35 percent who say they personally were treated unfairly while shopping during the past 30 days, up from 24 percent last year," a press release explaining the poll said.

Before this year, the percentage of Black adults who reported mistreatment at stores in the previous month ranged from 24 percent to 30 percent, the release said.

In addition, 21 percent say they were treated unfairly in a restaurant, bar, theater or other entertainment place, compared with 18% in 2020, the release said.

Twenty percent also say they were treated unfairly in dealings with police in 2021, compared with 19 percent in 2020, the release also said.

The results come at a time of greater awareness and sensitivity to racial inequities in US society, the release added.

Results were based on telephone interviews conducted June 1-July 5, 2021 with a random sample of 1,381 adults, ages 18 and above, living in all 50 US states and Washington, DC. The total sample is weighted to represent racial and ethnic groups proportionately to their share of the US population, with the margin of sampling error plus or minus 3 percentage points and a 95 percent confidence level, according to Gallup.

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UN Calls on Tunisian Leaders to Act Responsibly to Maintain Calm - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, July 27 (Sputnik) - The United Nations maintains contacts with the Tunisian government and stakeholders through the country's diplomatic mission in New York and through its presence on the ground and urges resolving the differences through dialogue and act responsibly to maintain calm, UN spokesman Farhan Haq said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"We are continuing our contacts with the Tunisian government both here in New York and through our team on the ground," Haq said. "What we're doing is encouraging the Tunisian political leaders and stakeholders to quickly resolve disagreements through dialogue and compromise and act with responsibility to maintain calm."

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UN Chief Welcomes Restoration of Communication Channels on Korean Peninsula - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, July 27 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is encouraged to see North and South Korea resuming the communication channels between them, United Nations spokesperson Farhan Haq said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"The Secretary-General welcomes the announcement by the two Koreas of the resumption of the Panmunjom and Inter-Korean Liaison Office communication channels today as well as the re-connection of the military hotline," Haq said. "The Secretary-General fully supports the continued effort of the parties towards the improvement of their relationship, sustainable peace and complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."

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Russia's Economy Recovering Faster Than Expected - IMF

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has determined that Russia's economy is recovering faster than expected, IMF Economic Counselor Gita Gopinath told reporters on Tuesday.

In its updated World Economic Outlook, released earlier in the day, the IMF has changed upward the economic outlook for Russia to 4.4 percent for 2021 from the 3.8 percent forecast in April.

"In the case of Russia, we have seen faster recovery. For the first quarter GDP growth came in stronger than we were expecting," Gopinath said.

Russia still faces challenges as the coronavirus pandemic is not over, she said.

Gopinath urged Russia to do more to speed up the level of vaccination.

The IMF also decreased its forecast for Russia for 2022 to 3.1 percent from the 3.8 percent forecast in April.

"We expect the growth to moderate next year," Deputy Director of the Research Department Petya Koeva Brooks said.

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US Coast Guard Breaks Ground for \$35Mln Expansion of California Base

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Construction to expand a base in the state of California to service two new of offshore patrol cutters will begin with a ceremony this week, the US Coast Guard said on Tuesday.

"With the addition of the two new offshore patrol cutters, the base will require more space and staff to support the growing fleet," a Coast Guard press release said. "The state-of-the-art ships are scheduled to replace the service's 270-foot and 210-foot medium endurance cutters, and will be used to patrol the open ocean."

The \$35 million, 11,500-square-foot Naval Engineering Department facility will support the 360-foot Coast Guard Cutter Argus and Coast Guard Cutter Chase. The vessels now under construction are slated to arrive in late 2022/early 2023, the release said.

The Coast Guard is scheduled to break ground Wednesday on the facility at Base Los Angeles/Long Beach in the California city of San Pedro on Wednesday, the release added.

The expanded base will be home to the Argus and Chase. The vessels will join the base's four 154-foot fast response cutters - Forrest Rednour, Robert Ward, Terrell Horne and Benjamin Bottoms - and the 175-foot buoy tender George Cobb, according to the release.

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Lenderking Arrives in Saudi Arabia for Talks on Yemen Peace, New UN Envoy - US State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking arrived in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to address the importance of an inclusive peace process in Yemen and the rapid appointment of new UN Special Envoy, the US State Department Office of the Spokesperson said in a media note on Tuesday.

"US Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking arrived in Saudi Arabia today, where he will meet with senior officials from the Saudi and Republic of Yemen Governments," the note said.

"Special Envoy Lenderking will meet with representatives from the international community and the UN Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen to discuss the importance of an inclusive peace process and a rapid appointment of a new UN Envoy."

Lenderking will also discuss the consequences of the Houthi movement's offensive on the Marib governorate, the note said. Moreover, he will address the urgent need to stabilize Yemen's economy and facilitate the timely import of fuel to northern Yemen and the need for the Houthis to end the "manipulation" of fuel imports and prices, it added.

In May, former UN Special Envoy for Yemen Martin Griffiths was named the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

According to diplomatic sources at the United Nations, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has picked Swedish diplomat Hans Grundberg to replace Griffiths, but his appointment has not been confirmed yet by the UN General Assembly.

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US Capitol Police Describe 'Horrific' Violence in First Hearing on January 6 Riot

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The US Capitol police on Tuesday described the events on January 6 as a "horrific" during the first hearing of the House select committee formed to investigate the incident.

Four officers - US Capitol Police Sgt. Aquilino Gonell, officer Harry Dunn and Washington, DC Metropolitan Police officers Daniel Hodges and Michael Fanone - shared their stories with the select committee.

Gonell, who was the first to speak, said he did not recognize his fellow citizens on January 6. An immigrant from the Dominican Republic, Gonell recounted his experience of serving in Iraq, but said what he saw on January 6 was nothing compared to his experience in Iraq.

"In Iraq, it was a war zone, but I was not prepared for what I saw on January 6," he said.

Gonell recalled that the protesters sprayed the lawmakers' officers and called the officers to join. He described the scene at the Capitol as a "medieval battlefield."

"After order finally had been restored at the Capitol and after many exhausting hours, I arrived home at nearly 4 a.m. on January 7. I had to push away my wife from hugging me because of all the chemicals that covered my body," Gonell said with tears in his eyes.

Fanone, who spoke second, recalled seeing his colleagues shouting, some bleeding and being fatigued in the chaos.

"The mob began to beat me with fists and metal objects... I heard someone shouting 'Kill him with his own gun'," he said, adding that he was tased and beaten.

Fanone recalled that he was thinking of his four daughters at that time and pleaded to the protesters not to kill him.

He said he later went to a hospital to treat his injuries where he learned that he had suffered a heart attack.

Hodges was the third officer to testify and recalled that he doubted from the very beginning the gathered crowd came just to protest.

"A woman called us stormtroopers... They shouted that we were in 'the wrong team'," he said.

Dunn, an African American, recalled that he was subjected to racial abuse by the protesters.

"They shouted: 'President Trump invited us here, Biden is not our president,' but I said: 'I voted for Biden.'"

Dunn said after that initial exchange the rioters started saying racist slurs.

On January 6, a group of supporters of former President Donald Trump entered the US Capitol in a bid to protest the lawmakers certifying the 2020 election results from several states Trump said were fraudulent. One protester was shot dead during the incident and the law enforcement authorities charged 500 people for their participation in it.

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Inflation to Remain Elevated in Emerging Markets, Developing Economies in 2022 - IMF

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) expects to see elevated levels of inflation in some developing economies next year, IMF Economic Counselor Gita Gopinath told reporters on Tuesday.

"Inflation is expected to remain elevated next year in some emerging markets and developing economies," Gopinath said during virtual press briefing.

Gopinath warned, however, that developed countries continue to face the risk of high inflation.

"In the United States, we are seeing very high inflation readings," Gopinath said.

The prices of virtually all commodities, including lumber, have skyrocketed in the past several months in the United States as have transportation and other services. In June, the consumer prices increased 0.9 percent and the Consumer Price Index accelerated 5.4 percent year-on-year.

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World's Schools Must Open as They Can Not Wait for Coronavirus Vaccines - UN

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - In parts of the world where coronavirus vaccines are in short supply, schools should be the last institutions to close and the first to reopen because

classrooms are not major sources of coronavirus contagion, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said on Tuesday.

"Reopening schools cannot wait for all teachers and students to be vaccinated. With the global vaccine shortages plaguing low and middle-income countries, vaccinating frontline workers and those most at risk of severe illness and death will remain a priority," UNICEF spokesperson James Elder told reporters.

Clear evidence shows that primary and secondary schools are not primary drivers of coronavirus transmission, Elder added.

Elder cited data showing that in the Northern Hemisphere, more than 600 million primary and secondary students in areas not normally closed during the summer remain out of school.

In nearly half of nations in Asia and the Pacific, schools have been closed for more than 200 days during the pandemic, and schools remain on lockdown in 18 nations or territories in Latin America and the Caribbean, Elder said.

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US to Lift Travel Restrictions With Canada When Coronavirus Cases Diminish - Mayorkas

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The US government will lift travel restrictions between the United States and Canada when the coronavirus cases of the emergent Delta variant are sufficiently reduced, Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said during a Senate hearing on Tuesday.

"We are mindful of and monitoring every single day the economic impact of the travel restrictions... we are watching the trajectory of the pandemic - a pandemic of the unvaccinated - we are watching the Delta variant very carefully, and we will lift those restrictions in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control when the arc of the pandemic so warrants," Mayorkas said. Mayorkas was responding in particular about travel restrictions between the United States and Canada, having been asked by Senator Gary Peters about what criteria the Biden administration is using to reach the travel restriction decision.

Canadian Health Minister Patty Hajdu announced last week that Canada will be opening its borders to fully vaccinated US citizens starting on August 9 as well as to other foreigners on September 7.

Mayorkas also said he spoke with Canadian Minister of Public Safety Bill Blair last week about the decision. Blair said there is "nothing embarrassing" about the lack of reciprocity in the lifting of travel restrictions between the United States and Canada.

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US Consumer Confidence Back at Pre-Pandemic Levels - Conference Board

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - US consumer confidence increased for a fifth straight month in June to return to levels seen before the novel coronavirus outbreak 16 months ago, the Conference Board said on Tuesday.

"Consumer confidence increased in June and is currently at its highest level since the onset of the pandemic's first surge in March 2020," Conference Board Senior Director of Economic Indicators Lynn Franco said. "Consumers' assessment of current conditions improved again, suggesting economic growth has strengthened further in Q2 [second quarter]."

June's reading for consumer confidence followed gains in four previous months, boosting expectations for business and labor market conditions too, the data showed.

Franco explained that consumers' short-term optimism rebounded, buoyed by expectations that business conditions and their own financial prospects will continue improving in the months ahead.

"While short-term inflation expectations increased, this had little impact on consumers' confidence or purchasing intentions. In fact, the proportion of consumers planning to purchase homes, automobiles, and major appliances all rose - a sign that consumer spending will continue to support economic growth in the short-term. Vacation intentions also rose, reflecting a continued increase in spending on services," Franco said.

Consumer spending contributes almost 70 percent of the total United States production while household consumption makes up about 60 percent of the economy.

The US economy itself grew by an annualized rate of 6.4 percent in the first quarter of 2021, after a 3.5 percent contraction for all of 2020 due to shutdowns and other disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic measures. The Federal Reserve envisions a 6.5 percent expansion for all of this year, although some officials at the central bank have more ambitious expectations, forecasting growth of up to 7 percent.

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Russia Hosting Cybercriminals, But Russian Government Not Behind Attacks - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) – Russia is hosting more cybercriminals than any other country, but there is no evidence that the Russian government is behind a recent wave of cyberattacks, Deputy Assistant Attorney General Richard Downing said in testimony to Congress on Tuesday.

"Certainly, Russia is at the top of the list," Downing said during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing when asked which country harbors the most cybercriminals. "I would not say that the government of Russia is behind these attacks."

Downing added, however, that Russian authorities are not doing everything that they can do to suppress cyberattacks.

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UN Rights Expert Urges UNSC to Demand Ceasefire in Myanmar Amid COVID-19 - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, July 27 (Sputnik) - UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Tom Andrews on Tuesday called on the UN Security Council and member states to push for an immediate ceasefire amid the growing COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

"The UN must act immediately to halt the military junta's attacks, harassment, and detentions in the midst of a COVID-19 crisis," Andrews said in a statement. "Member States with influence on Myanmar's State Administrative Council must follow passage of a UN resolution by urging an immediate cessation of attacks."

According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Myanmar's military has killed at least 931 people and is currently holding at least 5,630 in arbitrary detention.

The military has also conducted at least 260 attacks against health-care personnel and facilities, murdering at least 18 people. In addition, arrests warrants have been issued for over 600 health workers, and at least 67 are currently being held by the military, the OHCHR said.

Andrews urged UN Security Council member states to use all available tools to demand that the junta immediately ceases its attacks against healthcare workers desperately needed to combat the pandemic in Myanmar.

The UN expert called on the council to pass a resolution similar to the one adopted in February, calling for ceasefires in all countries with conflict to allow for the safe distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, focusing specifically on Myanmar.

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Russian Ambassador Says His 'Dream' to Restore Direct Flights Between Alaska, Chukotka

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said during a meeting of the Council for US-Russia Relation (RAPP) on Tuesday that his "dream" is to revive the direct flights between Alaska and Chukotka.

"The potential for connections across the Pacific is enormous. They are free from the contradictions historically inherent in the 'Atlantic dimension.' Moreover, Russia is the third closest neighbor of the United States after Canada and Mexico. It is also my dream to restore direct flights between Chukotka and Alaska,"

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US to Reverse COVID-19 Guidance, Recommend Masks for Vaccinated People - Reports

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) will advise coronavirus vaccinated individuals to wear masks indoors, reversing earlier guidance that face masks are no longer needed, the New York Times reported on Tuesday.

The updated guidance would apply to areas of the US experiencing a surge of infections, including so called breakthrough infections in vaccinated individuals, due to the more contagious Delta variant of the coronavirus, the report said.

The new recommendations expected later on Tuesday would mark a sharp turnabout from the CDC's position since May that vaccinated people do not need to wear masks in most indoor spaces, the report added.

The report followed a meeting by US health officials Sunday night to review new evidence that may have prompted the reversal.

The CDC's initial guidance in May said people vaccinated against the coronavirus could go mask-free indoors, but recommended that unvaccinated people wear masks.

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Russia Calls for Restoring Work of Bering Strait Regional Commission - Antonov

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Russia calls for reviving the work of the Bering Strait Regional Commission to include representatives of the indigenous population, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said during a meeting at the Council for US-Russia Relations (RAPP) on Tuesday.

"The participants of the Pacific Partnership include the Arctic regions of the two countries, Antonov said."First of all, these are Chukotka and Alaska. For them, the problem of preserving the unique identity of the northern peoples, preserving the fragile ecosystem of the Arctic Circle, energy stability and ensuring navigation in ice - is urgent. We support restoring the work of the Bering Strait Regional Commission with the involvement of representatives of the indigenous population. It is worth resuming joint academic research between universities in Alaska and the Russian Far East."

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US, Russia Could Cooperate in Fight Against Natural, Man-Made Disasters - Antonov

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Russia and the United States could collaborate on combating natural and man-made disasters, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said during a meeting of the Council for US-Russia Relations (RAPP) on Tuesday.

"[T]he problems of environmental protection, the fight against natural and man-made disasters, such as forest fires, are at the forefront," Antonov said. "So, every year the United States' west and Russia's Siberia face this scourge. Currently, the states of Washington, Oregon and

California are on fire. We have a difficult situation in Yakutia. Why don't the local authorities establish a dialogue on this topic? I am sure this will seriously add to the RAPP agenda."

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US, Russia Must Solve Significant Problems or Risk Moving Toward Greater Crisis - Antonov

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Very significant problems have accumulated in the relations between the United States and Russia and failing to solve them would make it impossible to prevent moving to an even greater crisis, Russian Ambassador in Washington Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday.

"Colossal heaps of problems have accumulated, without solving of which it would be impossible to stop the movement into the abyss of an even greater crisis," Antonov said during a meeting of the Council for US-Russia Relations (RAPP).

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Russia Invites Western Companies to Take Part in Vladivostok Economic Forum - Envoy

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Russia is extending an invitation to the authorities and companies of Western states to participate in the upcoming Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok in September, Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said on Tuesday.

"We invite the authorities and commercial companies of the Western states to participate at the 6th Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok on September 2-4," Antonov said during a meeting of the Council for US-Russia Relations (RAPP).

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UNHCR Concerned 24,000 Eritrean Refugees in Tigray Deprived of Aid - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, July 27 (Sputnik) - The United Nations expressed its concern about the fate of some 24,000 Eritrean refugees trapped in camps in the Tigray region and cut off from essential humanitarian assistance, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spokesperson Babar Baloch said on Tuesday.

"An estimated 24,000 Eritrean refugees in Mai Aini and Adi Harush camps in Tigray's Mai Tsebri area are facing intimidation and harassment and living in constant anguish, cut off from humanitarian assistance," Baloch said during a press briefing.

For the last two weeks, United Nations staff has lost access to both camps, where clean drinking water is running out, and the last food distribution, providing rations for one month, was done in June, Baloch said.

In addition, the main humanitarian supply road between Semera in the Afar region and Mekelle in Tigray has been completely blocked since July 18, preventing UNHCR and other agencies' aid supplies from leaving Semera, Baloch said.

The UN refugee agency also received credible information that at least one refugee in Mai Aini was killed by armed elements operating in the camp, Baloch added.

Meanwhile, armed confrontations taking place close to the locations in the Afar region where refugees are hosted, risk to displace an additional 55,000 people, according.

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US Presses Need for Yemen Cease Fire in Talks With Oman - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman stressed the importance of a negotiated halt in fighting between rival factions in Yemen's civil war as a key to regional security in a meeting with Oman Deputy Foreign Minister Khalifa Al Harthy in the Omani capital of Muscat, the State Department said in a readout of the session on Tuesday.

"The Deputy Secretary also thanked the Deputy Foreign Minister for Oman's role in mediating peace in the region and underscored the importance of an immediate, comprehensive ceasefire to help bring the war in Yemen to an end," the readout said.

Sherman credited Oman for mediating peace negotiation in other regional conflicts and cited a "comprehensive ceasefire in neighboring Yemen" as a step toward ending the war in Yemen.

Yemen has been engulfed in an armed conflict between the government forces and Houthi rebels for nearly seven years. The conflict is widely viewed as a proxy war pitting a Saudi-led coalition of Arab states against Iran, which the US accuses of arming the Houthis and facilitating attacks on Saudi targets with missiles and drones from Houthi positions.

In addition to the armed hostilities, Yemen continues to suffer from famine and an ongoing cholera outbreak with the COVID-19 pandemic further worsening the nation's economic and humanitarian crises.

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US House Republican Leader Calls Probe of Capitol Riot 'Sham' Ahead of First Hearing

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and other Republican members of Congress criticized the special committee probing the January 6 Capitol riot as a "sham" ahead of its first hearing on Tuesday.

McCarthy was speaking ahead of the first hearing of the House select committee formed to investigate the January 6 attack on the US Capitol. Last week, US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi rejected two Republican candidates who McCarthy had chosen to serve on the special committee, both strong supporters of former President Donald Trump. In response to the move, McCarthy accused Pelosi of abusing her power and pulled the rest of the committee's Republican members off the panel.

"What you won't hear from Pelosi's sham committee: Why was the Capitol left so vulnerable that day? Why wasn't the National Guard here? Why didn't we have a better security posture? What changes are needed to make sure it never happens again?" McCarthy said.

He added that the Republicans wanted to participate in the commission hearing.

"[There are] Republicans who are able to be in the committee, who have jurisdiction, have the knowledge and the ability to ask the tough questions and get the right answers," McCarthy said. On January 6, supporters of Donald Trump stormed Capitol Hill in a bid to prevent Congress from certifying Joe Biden's presidential election victory. At least five people, including a female air force veteran, were killed in the riot, and more than 500 people have been charged over their participation in the incident.

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Slower-Than Anticipated Vaccine Rollout Poses Risks to Global Economic Growth - IMF

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned on Tuesday that the slower-than-expected pace of coronavirus vaccinations may pose a risk to global economic growth.

"Risks around the global baseline are to the downside. Slower-than-anticipated vaccine rollout would allow the virus to mutate further," the IMF said in its updated World Economic Outlook. The IMF said financial conditions could tighten rapidly if the trend persists and inflation expectations may increase quicker than anticipated.

"A double hit to emerging market and developing economies from worsening pandemic dynamics and tighter external financial conditions would severely set back their recovery and drag global growth below this outlook's baseline," the report said.

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IMF Revises Growth Forecast for Euro Area Upward to 4.6% in 2021 - World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised the growth forecast for the Euro area to 4.6 percent in 2021 and to 4.3 percent in 2022, the fund said in its World Economic Outlook on Tuesday.

The IMF also said in the report that it has increased its initial projection by 0.2 percent for this year and by 0.5 percent for 2022.

The IMF said Spain is projected to grow 6.2 percent this year, while Germany, France and Italy are projected to grow by 3.6 percent, 5.8 percent and 4.9 percent, respectively.

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IMF Revises Forecast for Economic Growth in China to 8.1% in 2021 - World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised downward its forecast for economic growth in China to 8.1 percent this year, but increased it to 5.7 percent for 2022, the IMF said in its World Economic Outlook on Tuesday.

"China's 2021 forecast is revised down 0.3 percentage point on a scaling back of public investment and overall fiscal support," the report said relative to its outlook released in April.

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IMF Revises Upward Forecast for US Economic Growth to 7% in 2021- World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) revised its forecast for US economic growth to 7 percent in 2021 and to 4.9 percent in 2022, the fund said in its World Economic Outlook on Tuesday.

The initial projections made in the previous World Economic Outlook in April have been increased by 0.6 percent for 2021 and 1.4 percent for 2022, respectively, the IMF said.

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Global Trade Projected to Expand 9.7% in 2021, 7% in 2022 - IMF

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Global trade will expand 9.7 percent in 2021 and 7 percent next year, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) revealed in its updated World Economic Outlook report on Tuesday.

"Despite near-term supply disruptions, global trade volumes are projected to expand 9.7 percent in 2021, moderating to 7 percent in 2022," the report said.

The merchandise trade recovery is set to broaden after being initially concentrated in pandemic-related purchases, consumer durables and medical equipment, while services trade is expected to recover more slowly due to the limited cross-border travel, the report said.

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Global Economy Projected to Grow 6% in 2021, 4.9% in 2022 - IMF

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The global economy is expected to grow at 6 percent in 2021 and at 4.9 percent in 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its updated World Economic Outlook report on Tuesday.

"The global economy is projected to grow 6 percent in 2021 and 4.9 percent in 2022," the report said.

The IMF left unchanged its projection for this year's growth from its forecast in April, but raised the projection for 2022.

"The 0.5 percentage point upgrade for 2022 derives largely from the forecast upgrade for advanced economies, particularly the United States, reflecting the anticipated legislation of additional fiscal support in the second half of 2021 and improved health metrics more broadly across the group," the report said.

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IMF Revises Russia's Growth Forecast for 2021 Upward to 4.4% - World Economic Outlook

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has changed upward its economic outlook for Russia in 2021 to 4.4 percent, the IMF said in its World Economic Outlook report on Tuesday.

The IMF boosted the projection for Russia by 0.6 percent compared to its outlook stated in April. However, the IMF decreased its forecast for Russia for 2022 to 3.1 percent from 3.8 percent it projected in April, the report said.

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IMF Revises Growth Forecast for Euro Area Upward to 4.6% in 2021, 4.3% in 2022 - World Economic Outlook

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RPT - US Airline Assoc in Touch With Authorities, Pipeline Operators on Fuel Shortage - Official

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Airlines For America (A4A) has been in touch with both the federal authorities and the pipeline operators on the nationwide fuel shortage, A4A's Managing Director of Industry Communications Carter Yang told Sputnik.

"We have been and continue to be in communication with federal authorities and pipeline operators to address this jet fuel capacity issue," Yang said on Monday.

Yang pointed out that a lack of available pipeline space for jet fuel as well as a shortage of fuel trucks and drivers amid surging demand for air travel and cargo are adding to low fuel inventories at some airports, particularly in smaller ones in the western United States.

"US airlines are working to accommodate that demand while minimizing any potential disruptions to passengers or shippers," Yang said. "Carriers are taking proactive measures such as having aircraft take on extra fuel at non-impacted origin airports in order to supplement the fuel supply at impacted destination airports."

A4A advocates on behalf of its member airlines to shape crucial policies and measures that promote safety, security and a healthy US airline industry, and works Congress to improve aviation for the traveling and shipping public, according to its website.

A4A comments come amid the reports that the fuel shortages will last through almost the end of the summer.

American Airlines jet fuel shortages that impacted mostly Western cities amid wildfires have spread across the United States and will continue until the middle of August, CNBC reported citing an internal company memorandum.

US media reported that more than 20,000 firefighters were combating explosive wildfires across the West during the weekend, as homes burned and thousands of residents fled fast-spreading flames.

The airline warned its pilots about fuel delivery delays at certain midsize airports and asked them to save fuel when possible, according to the report. The carrier blamed the shortage on a lack of trucks, drivers and jet fuel supply itself, the report added.

The airline also said flights will carry additional fuel into airports affected by shortages, a procedure known as tankering.

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RPT - US-Russia Museum Cooperation to Help Governments Improve Relations - Director

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - Cooperation between museums in the United States and Russia will help both countries to improve bilateral relations, Executive Director of the Russian History Museum in the state of New York, Michael Perekrestov, told Sputnik.

"Despite the great challenges of arranging international loans in the time of the pandemic and at a time when the relationship between the US and Russia are not at the best, I am really pleased that we were able to overcome them and to work with our Russian colleagues," Perekrestov said.

The museum, located at the premises of the Russian Holy Trinity Orthodox monastery in the city of Jordanville, represents one of the largest and oldest collections of Russian historical and cultural artifacts in the United States.

Recently, the museum sent several dozens of artifacts to the museum in Tsarskoe Selo near St. Petersburg.

"We provided a loan of 50 objects from our collection to the museum in Tsarskoe Selo in Russia," he said.

Their exhibition opening on Friday is dedicated to the military escorts that accompanied Russian Tsars and Emperors from the 16th century, Perekrestov noted.

COOPERATION DEVOID OF POLITICS

Perekrestov explained that the project is completely devoid of politics.

"Our mission is to share our collections with the broadest possible audience," he said.

Perekrestov also highlighted the importance of cooperation with Russian colleagues as both sides can only benefit from such collaboration.

"We also hope that our respective governments will repair their relationship. I think we have far more in common with each other than we have dividing us," he said.

Speaking of the loan to the museum in Tsarskoe Selo, Perekrestov - a US citizen of Russian descent - emphasized that some of the pieces are returning to Russia for the first time in 100 years.

"Perhaps, the most important one is the St. George Standard that was presented to the Black Sea Division, which was a sub-unit of the Imperial escort," he said.

The Standard was brought to the United States through other countries by the escort unit members after the 1917 revolution. In fact, it was in the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoe Selo along standards from other units, but several officers took it out of the palace after the revolution.

"There was an edict of the provisional government saying that all of the Tsarist symbols would be taken off. However, if you take a look at this Standard, there is so much Tsarist symbolism there, including the Imperial double-headed eagle with the crown, if you would move all of that then that would not be much left of the standard," Perekrestov said. "So, understandably, members of this unit went into the Catherine Palace and took this standard."

Other artifacts provided to the exhibition in Tsarskoe Selo include a military uniform, documents, a congratulatory address from Kuban Cossack Host that was present to the Emperor escort in 1961 when they were celebrating the unit's 150th anniversary.

"We were not able to provide some other objects because of their fragility, and we have provided scans," Perekrestov said.

Due to artifacts being in a fragile condition, the museum in Jordanville had to refrain from sending to Russia an original of a big photo album showing the story of everyday life of the members of the Imperial escort shortly after they moved to Serbia, he said.

"These people were working on mills, building roads, lining in barracks, and trying to maintain a sense of the unit in hope that they would soon go back to resume the fight against communism and to free their land from the Bolsheviks," Perekrestov added.

PEOPLE PRESERVED HISTORY

Perekrestov said every artifact from the collection has its own very interesting story, including how these objects left Russia and their journey over the course of decades.

"It is extraordinary to think that these items witnessed world wars and revolutions, a civil war and are now in our collection," he said.

Perekrestov explained the Imperial escort collection in Jordanville was formed from a two-part donation. In 1997, Nikolay Protopopov, the son of a member of the escort and leader of the unit's association, provided a large amount of items, while the other artifacts were donated by his widow, Nadezhda Protopopova, five years ago, he said.

"These people were trying to preserve this history," Perekrestov added.

The Russian History Museum officially opened in 1984, but some exhibits in the Holy Trinity monastery were organized in the 1960s and were mostly oriented to the Russian émigré community and individuals who visited the convent as pilgrims.

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RPT - Biden Pulling Troops From Iraq to Avoid Clashes With Iran, Turkey - Ex-Pentagon Official

WASHINGTON, July 27 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration will likely follow through on its announcement to pull all American combat forces from Iraq by the end of the year to avoid clashes with Iran and Turkey, former senior adviser to the Acting US Defense Secretary, Douglas Macgregor, told Sputnik.

On Monday, Biden, when meeting visiting Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi at the White House, said the US combat mission in Iraq would come to a close by the end of this year. After December 31, 2021 the United States will switch to training and assisting Iraqi forces to counter the Islamic State (IS, a terrorist group banned in Russia).

"Biden and his advisers fear the potential for conflict with Iran that our [US] presence in Iraq creates," Macgregor, a retired US Army Colonel and military historian and tactician, said. "They are equally concerned about [Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan's role in Iraq and Syria." Macgregor, who commanded the main US armored force victory over Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard in the 1991 Iraq War, also said the US economy cannot withstand the pressure that a major regional war would exert.

"As a result, he [Biden] will honor the pledge," he said.

The current Baghdad government led by al-Kadhimi was already dependent on Tehran and its allies for survival, Macgregor said.

Meanwhile, he added, Turkish aspirations to regain control of northern Iraq and its oil fields are "real."

"As Erdogan expands his control and influence in Kurdistan, Baghdad's dependence on Tehran will increase to ensure Baghdadi's survival," Macgregor said.

IS, Macgregor added, was a creature of Erdogan and "US stupidity" and was always designed to fight and destroy Shiite control of Iraq and Syria.

"If Erdogan can focus it on Iraq he may use it, but Erdogan will measure what he might gain by what he may lose by re-purposing ISIS [IS]. There is no point in reviving it if he cannot control it," Macgregor said.

